

DESIGN & DECORATING



◀ Studied History
Carefully constructed period details like decorative moldings and herringbone floors imply period architecture, but this gentleman's library is actually a newly built addition to the home. The room was designed to accommodate the 18th-century French tapestry from which springs its disciplined color scheme of beige, green-blue and brown. The walls—in Benjamin Moore's dusky green Pacific Rim—nod to the influence of Parish-Hadley, the groundbreaking midcentury American firm where Mr. Istomin trained early in his career and which was known for its dark, glossy walls. The color not only reinforces the country setting of trees in leaf but allies with the blues and greens of the pillows and custom bookshelves to make the library's eclecticism seem more unified. A contemporizing trick: "The contrast between the dark walls and white ceiling, white doors and light upholstery and rug makes the room more modern," said the designer.

Violet It Be ▼
According to Mr. Istomin, one piece can set a room in motion. In this bedroom, a bold 20th-century metal chandelier featuring a riot of glass grapes and pears inspired the space's color scheme and playful, feminine character. A pair of petite, clean-lined turquoise bedside tables help keep the room looking more fresh than fusty. Mr. Istomin echoes the chandelier's violet dangles with a Ukrainian cotton rug and delicate lilac wall paint (Benjamin Moore's Easter Ribbon). Showing uncharacteristic restraint, he limited wall décor to two diminutive religious icons, a small selection from the family's vast collection, whose placement reinforces the symmetry that calms down the room's fairly busy décor.



HOUSE TOUR

Czar Quality

In a 1990s country house outside Moscow, a designer conjures a venerable dacha that might have been there since Nicholas I

BY SARAH KARNASIEWICZ

GLOBE-TROTTERING RUSSIAN designer Kirill Istomin has made his name with interiors that embrace old-world opulence without ignoring the needs of non-old-world occupants. Whether working in Paris or Kazakhstan, Mr. Istomin creates spaces that evoke romantic, 19th-century epics: rooms slicked with gilt, decked in china, festooned in lace and imbued with longing. In a country house outside Moscow, for a couple who work in the pharmaceuticals industry and their 20-year-old daughter, he was challenged to create that palpable sense of history in a home built only two decades ago. "I wanted it to look grand," explained the designer, who maintains offices in New York and Moscow. "Not in terms of being flamboyant or important or exquisite, but like something that had been cared for by generations." To create a sense that the furnishings had accrued through inheritance, Mr. Istomin had to be both an aesthetic magpie and a meticulous editor—or risk veering into hoarder territory. Formulas such as keeping color palettes tight to avoid the look of clutter helped him convey a house with a past that's eminently livable today.



Checkered Past ▲
The Chinese, English and French porcelain on the dining room's walls suggest the accumulated finds of several decades of owners. The "inherited" concept could look disorderly, Mr. Istomin explained, but he and his team arranged the china on the floor before hanging the schemes on the wall: "The symmetry of the plates, the patterns and swags create a sort of decorative architecture in the room and a very deliberate structure." A counterpoint to the fanciness: the understated, rustic gingham chair-back covers. "It's a pattern we repeat in different colors in various spaces as a way of bringing the look down to earth," Mr. Istomin said. "That way, even special pieces don't scream 'Look at me!'"

Unfrenzied Frippery ►
A confection of pink and lace, this formal sitting room skillfully walks the line between chaos and chic. According to Mr. Istomin, the starting point for the décor was the hand-blocked Brunswick & Fils wall covering called Roses Pompon, a reproduction of a 19th-century pattern. "The [room's] roses and the lace could be very old ladyish, but I was determined to put a new spin on it," he explained. One piece of the solution: framing the seating with a pair of symmetrical stepped bookcases, whose 1930s-inspired lines help balance curves and frills elsewhere. "If I had put a Louis XV piece there, it would have dated the entire space," Mr. Istomin said. A narrow range of hues also helps keep intricacy from overloading the eye.



Bath Mastery ▲
Mr. Istomin takes a contrary approach to the bathroom, usually a utilitarian affair, creating an atmosphere of old-fashioned luxury with drapes and upholstery of hand-blocked Hazelton House fabrics. Note, though, that he trimmed the drapes in gingham, undercutting the fabric's floridity. His other high-drama move: layers of reflection. On the mirror above the room's vanity, he installed large, mirror-mounted three-branch sconces, an unconventional choice. "Usually you wouldn't put mirrored sconces on top of a mirror—it's a small room, and the scale feels off," he said.